

Scare away the demons of fear

→ **Employees of public institutions and NGOs whose task is to contact the Romani minority should have appropriate qualifications.**

Problems affecting most of the Romani in Poland and in Europe, such as unemployment, poverty, and social exclusion, are connected with a very low level of education. This in turn results from the Romani's lack of trust in non-Romani forms of upbringing, as they follow their own code of conduct called the **Romanipen**. Since people tend to evaluate others from the point of view of their own value systems, this approach is met with disapproval from most Europeans.

In the 2009–2010 academic year, Jacek Bylica, PhD, from the **Institute of Pedagogy** at the Jagiellonian University, and Barbara Surzyn, MA, a psychologist at the **Municipal Social Welfare Centre in Andrychów**, in cooperation with the Regional Development Agency in Nowy Sącz, conducted a research and training project which not only enabled the analysis and development of the knowledge and skills of the people responsible for good relations with the Romani community in the Nowy Sącz region, but also allowed for the preparation of research tools to measure these competences.



↑
Józef Orłowski, President of Malopolska and the Silesian Roma Association, Poland. Photo by Andrzej Grzymala – Kazłowski

In search of a solution

In their work with a group composed of 30 people representing various institutions of the Romani environment in the Nowy Sącz (social workers, teachers, municipal guards, and court guardians), Jacek Bylica, PhD, and Barbara Surzyn, MA, used an **approach combining theory and practice** called participatory action research. This enabled the subjects to become participants and partners, and the study itself became practice as it led to solving problems similar to those faced by the participants in their work.

One of the applied research methods was the **ethnographic empathy approach**, which allows for a better understanding

of the Romani world. As a consequence, it leads to the application of the empowerment strategy, which is the method of activating the cultural potential of Romani communities instead of imposing ready-made external solutions on them (which is usually done without Romani participation in the decision-making process).

Research participants filled out a special questionnaire based on several different methods including the Developmental Model of Intercultural Sensitivity (DMIS), developed by Milton Bennett. One of the participants eventually became the author of the project “Amen Rominiate Koda Kieraha,” whose objective was to stimulate the professional potential of Romani women from the settlement in Maszkowice.

“The pilot studies on the intercultural competences of employees of the Romani environment are pioneering both in Poland and throughout the world. It seems very important, considering the increasing social problems of the Romani in Europe and in the context of the realization of the Government Program for Romani community in Poland so far,” Bylica concludes.

The analysis of the intercultural competences of employees in public institutions in the Nowy Sącz powiat was the beginning of further research in this

area. Conclusions from the research that has been conducted so far were presented in the publication *Jeden świat – wiele kultur* (One World, Many Cultures; Kujawy and Pomorze University in Bydgoszcz, 2011), and in an abbreviated English version on the website romahealthnet.org.

Macedonian casus

The next stage of research was the pilot **measurement of intercultural competences** of representatives of several NGOs in Skopje, Macedonia, conducted in October 2012. The measurement



was carried out with the use of interviews and the Questionnaire of Romani Intercultural Competences, along with an evaluation of the nature of social policy that has been implemented towards Macedonian Roma. The Republic of Macedonia is one of the signatories of the Decade of Roma Inclusion in Europe. The non-governmental sector actively participates in the implementation of specific tasks of the Decade.

Among several successful initiatives, some problematic factors were also found. Problems in the area of health included the following: different perceptions of health in Romani communities, a lack of knowledge and awareness of rights among the Romani, a lack of funds for the purchase of drugs, a barrier between healthcare professionals and the Romani, hidden discrimination, and cultural boundaries.

It is worth noting that the actions taken resulted in the improvement of the "Self-employment" program, addressed mainly to educated Romani with entrepreneurial skills. This demanding and risky program is based on the assumption that "each Romani applies to the program with his/her own idea and that all humans, regardless of their origins, deserve the same work."

Progress in all levels of education, including the university level, is noticeable. One of the young Romani leaders, however, comments that "we do not have any choice." Families that want to receive money from social aid have to send their children to school. Another factor contributing to the progress in education is the possibility for Romani children to participate in pre-school classes free of charge.

In conclusion, the research did not result in an unequivocal answer to the question of whether the actions that were realized for the Romani in the Republic of Macedonia take into account Romani cultural tradition. Although the survey using the questionnaire reveals quite a high level of Romani intercultural competences among (non-Romani) representatives of NGOs, additional data obtained during interviews and participant observation proves that the threads of Romani assimilation and integration are intertwined.



The title of this article was inspired by the book *Demony cudzego strachu* (Demons of Other People's Fear; 1984), written by the outstanding Romologist, Jerzy Ficowski, who translated the poems of the Romani poet named Papisza.

ing. **Assimilation** is a tendency to adapt the Romani to the rules and expectations of the majority society, while **integration** is based on respecting the cultural differences of the Romani.

In 2014, the scientists will apply to the Polish National Centre for Science for the funding of a subsequent Polish-Macedonian research project called "Social reality of Polish and Macedonian Roma." The objective of the project will be to obtain the image of social reality as seen from the Romani point of view, and thus to solve the assimilation-integration dilemmas and prepare detailed prerequisites for effective intercultural policy.

The results of the research conducted in Macedonia so far were presented in April 2014 during the Fifth European Conference on Migrant and Ethnic Minority Health in Granada. They will also be discussed in the publication *Inny w przestrzeni społecznej* (The Other in social space; University of Adam Mickiewicz in Poznań, 2014).



Fatima Osmanovska, one of the founders of the Roma Resource Center in Shuto Orizari (Skopje), the Republic of Macedonia. Photo by Jacek Bylica

On the university trail

The issue of the development of intercultural competences with regard to working with the Romani community was reflected in the

new plans of studies of the Institute of Pedagogy, particularly in the major of rehabilitation pedagogy. Since the academic year 2012-2013, a facultative seminar "Intercultural competences in working with the Romani community" has been conducted. Students of the Erasmus program may participate in the English language version of this course. The results of the course evaluation will be presented in the publication *Różnice – edukacja – inkluzja* (Differences – education – inclusion; University of Gdańsk, 2014). ■

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